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Aims and Scope: Formerly *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text* (1997–2005), *Romantic Textualities: Literature and Print Culture, 1780–1840* is an online journal that is committed to foregrounding innovative Romantic-studies research into bibliography, book history, intertextuality and textual studies. To this end, we publish material in a number of formats: among them, peer-reviewed articles, reports on individual/group research projects, bibliographical checklists and biographical profiles of overlooked Romantic writers. *Romantic Textualities* also carries reviews of books that reflect the growing academic interest in the fields of book history, print culture, intertextuality and cultural materialism, as they relate to Romantic studies.

Susan Valladares, *Staging the Peninsular War: English Theatres 1807–1815* (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), x + 459pp. ISBN 9781472418630; £80 (hb).

HOW DID THE STAGE help shape Britons' understanding of the Napoleonic Wars? Susan Valladares' *Staging the Peninsular War: English Theatres 1807–1815* is a case study in this question. Focusing on the Peninsular War specifically, Valladares argues that 'the nation's crowded and excitable theatre auditoriums functioned as spaces of political discovery, assertion and confrontation' (p. 201). While the span of years that her work covers is intentionally narrow, her spatial coverage is broad, as she examines drama and spectacle not only in London's patent theatres, but also in the minor theatres and Bristol's Theatre Royal and Regency Theatre. The result is that she creates an image of British theatre and performance that is truly national, rather than exclusively metropolitan. As Valladares argues, 'English theatre cannot [...] be confined to the cultural life of Westminster and its immediate vicinity. By the early nineteenth century theatrical activity was also flourishing in the provinces, where the nation's many Theatre Royals played a key role in promoting the related feelings of civic amelioration and patriotism' (p. 153). Such a broad approach to theatre is particularly important for a project that is tied up in concepts of nation, patriotism and 'the articulation of national identities' (p. 8).

Valladares' temporal focus allows her to examine a precise political moment: the Peninsular War. As Valladares points out, this piece of the Napoleonic Wars has only recently begun to receive attention from literary scholars. Yet even for those without a specific interest in the Peninsular War, this work's temporal focus is valuable: as Valladares notes, she writes about a set of years 'often overlooked as a "black hole" in the nation's theatre history' (p. 2). With some recent exceptions, Romantic-era drama continues to be regarded as 'mental' theatre, ignoring the rich, spectacular productions that attracted audiences.

Yet the temporal limits of Valladares' title are deceptive in that much of the work focuses on plays from the eighteenth-century repertory that were reworked for this particular political moment. In Chapter 1, 'Pizarro, "Political Proteus"', Valladares reads performances of R. B. Sheridan's 1799 *Pizarro*, a play that she argues 'became one of the defining narratives of early nineteenth-century Britain', across a changing political landscape (p. 15). Insisting on the need to read both 'synchronically and diachronically', Valladares convincingly demonstrates that *Pizarro* was returned to throughout the early nineteenth century to reimagine and renegotiate Britain's relationship with Spain. *Pizarro* was performed and interpreted as everything from a literal critique of Spanish conquest in the Americas to an allegorical critique of the French invasion of Spain. Similarly, Chapter 2, 'Performing Shakespeare', focuses on appropriations and performances of Shakespeare during the Peninsular War. While this chapter includes fascinating examples of the ways early nineteenth-century theatres reworked Shakespeare (including William Barrymore's decision to perform *Macbeth* in 'Spanish habit'

following a British victory in 1809), the chapter as a whole feels disjointed and lacks a unifying narrative.

While the first two chapters focus on a play or set of plays, Chapters 3 and 4 examine the theatrical cultures that emerged in particular spaces. In these chapters Valladares' work comes alive and most fully creates a picture of England's diverse theatrical culture. Chapter 3, 'Spectacular Stages', focuses on London's minor theatres, examining the popularity of 'illegitimate dramaturgy' (p. 107). Valladares demonstrates the ways in which various minor theatres developed distinct specialties, from the aqua-dramas at Sadler's Wells to the equestrian entertainments at Astley's Amphitheatre, which they used not only to attract audiences, but also to represent contemporary politics and military campaigns. Her conclusion that 'the managers of the minor theatres were arguably more ambitious, experimental and innovative than their legitimate counterparts', proves convincing, particularly coming at the end of a chapter that paints such a lively image of onstage water tanks, recreated battlefields and non-verbal adaptations of Shakespeare.

In her final chapter, 'Playing to the Provinces', Valladares examines theatre in Bristol, choosing this location (of the many provincial theatres) because 'as a busy port city, it brings together the discourses of war, trade and politics' (p. 153). Bristol's national importance as a port city and the trading gateway with the Americas makes it a perfect choice for this book. This is her most successful chapter: not only does it weave together the previous three, as she analyzes performances of *Pizarro*, Shakespeare and illegitimate entertainments in Bristol, but it enriches our understanding of theatre outside of London—a subject that needs much more attention. By connecting her earlier arguments with an examination of Bristol's Theatre Royal and Regency Theatre, Valladares makes the complex argument that the previous chapters strive towards about theatre's role in shaping international politics and national identity. By demonstrating, for instance, that performances of Shakespeare's plays at the Bristol Theatre Royal were generally limited to benefit nights and nights when star actors were visiting, she convincingly argues that 'the Theatre Royal was able to promote the cultural exclusivity associated with the national bard, and to impart the impression that Shakespeare belonged to a larger, national project, dependent upon the mobility of actors and the beneficence of the local community to support its favourite plays and players' (p. 186). By analyzing Shakespeare's place in the Bristol repertory, she creates a brief section more intriguing than the earlier chapter on Shakespeare, for it weaves together the role of theatre in nation-formation with the attempts to make theatre itself a national project.

Valladares creates a rich picture of cultural engagement with the Peninsular War that goes beyond what we think of as traditional 'drama'. She connects her analysis of major works, like those by Sheridan and Shakespeare, to lecturing, graphic satire and illegitimate drama. By focusing on repurposed stock plays and illegitimate drama, Valladares deals primarily with 'innovative modes of delivering topical addresses' that worked around the strictures of the 1737 Stage Licensing Act (p. 12). Greater discussion of the legitimate plays that were produced in direct

response to the War, however, would have been a welcome addition. Moreover, by framing her project in relation to the Licensing Act, without directly addressing governmental censorship or suppression, she leaves her reader curious about when or how the government intervened in the staging of political plays or entertainments. What was perhaps most wanting in this work was a succinct overview of the Peninsular War. Valladares weaves political and military information into her chapters; yet the absence of even a short history in the introduction is a problem, especially for readers coming from theatre and literary rather than historical backgrounds. Such a history would also go a long way in making clear why an analysis of this war in particular is so necessary.

Nearly half of *Staging the Peninsular War* is made up of a calendar of performances at Covent Garden, Drury Lane and Bristol Theatre Royal between 1807 and 1815. This calendar, which surely took an immense amount of time and research to compile, is a very welcome addition to documentary works like *The London Stage* and *Theatre in Dublin*. Valladares' calendar covers a period that has not yet been documented in this form. She puts the plays with a Spanish or Portuguese theme in boldface, allowing us to visualise the argument she makes throughout about the wartime repertoire. As Valladares herself acknowledges, the calendar is limited: it does not include casting information or comments made on the playbills. This is the sort of information that (to quote Valladares quoting Jacky Bratton) provides evidence for 'those most difficult and evanescent aspects of theatre history—the expectations and dispositions of the audience, their personal experience of the theatre' (p. 212). In spite of these limitations, these calendars will make possible a great deal of future research. Like the book as a whole, they enrich our understanding of early nineteenth-century theatrical culture and its intersections with politics, on both a national and global scale.



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